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*Essays on the Lutheran Confessions Basic to
Lutheran Cooperation*

Published jointly by

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

and

The NATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL
NEW YORK, N. Y.

1961

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FOREWORD

In 1958 the National Lutheran Council extended to The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod an invitation to examine the whole question of cooperative activities in American Lutheranism. As background to such examination, it was deemed wise by both parties to conduct a series of meetings at which some of the fundamental theological issues relevant to any kind of cooperation might be discussed.

The papers presented in this brochure were prepared as source material for these free theological discussions. Present at these meetings were members of the Doctrinal Unity Committee of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Executive Committee of the National Lutheran Council, and a selected number of theologians and churchmen from both groups.

The first meeting, which was held in Chicago on July 7-9, 1960, was concerned with the meaning of the term, "doctrine of the Gospel," in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession. The key sentence in this Article is: "And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments."¹ Two essays were written for the first meeting, one by Dr. Conrad Bergendoff, President of Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, and the other by Dr. Martin Franzmann, Professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. They are exegetical in nature and speak to the New Testament understanding of the Gospel.

The second meeting was held on November 18-19, 1960 in St. Louis. The focal point of this meeting was the question: what doctrinal understanding is essential for the proper proclamation of the Gospel? To answer this properly within the Lutheran context, it was deemed necessary to explore the way in which one subscribes to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church. This was done on the basis of the topic, "The Significance of Confessional Subscription." Two papers were delivered—one by Dr. T. Tappert, Professor, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the other by Dr. Herbert Bouman, Professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.

A third meeting is scheduled for October 30 and 31 and November 1, 1961, and will consider the general topic "What kind of cooperation is possible in view of the discussions to-date?"

The group decided that the four essays should be mailed to all Lutheran pastors in America for careful study. This will afford the Lutheran clergy of America an opportunity to gain first-hand information about the position taken by representatives of the church bodies involved in these conferences. Of course, the reader will not have had the opportunity to evaluate the discussions which followed the reading of the essays.

All participants in the conferences agreed that there was much unified

1. Augsburg Confession, VII, *Concordia Triglotta*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1921, p. 47.

thinking on many of the points made by the essayists. For this we are grateful to God. This, however, does not mean that all differences have been overcome. This is especially true in view of the fact that the time was too short to permit a thorough discussion of the many facets of the four essays.

Furthermore, one or even two day meetings do not allow sufficient time for the discussion of all of the various doctrines of Holy Writ which are relevant. Much more study is necessary. We trust that the future will present further opportunities for such studies.

We sincerely pray and fervently hope that ultimately God may lead the Lutheran Churches to full agreement on the basis of Holy Writ and the Lutheran Confessions.

The groups attending these meetings are not competent to commit their church bodies to any specific agreements. It should be remembered that these discussions are exploratory. We are happy to report that they have been conducted in the true spirit of Christian charity, respect, and good will.

These essays are being circulated with the prayer that the Lord of the Church will lead us ever forward in the Spirit of His Truth.

DR. J. W. BEHNKEN
President, The Lutheran Church-
Missouri Synod

DR. NORMAN A. MENTER
President, National Lutheran
Council

May 10, 1961

Abbreviations Quotations

L.W. *Luther's Works*, edited by Helmut T. Lehmann and Jaroslav Pelikan, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-.

W.A. *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Weimar: Hermann Boehlaus, 1883-.

By common agreement among the essayists, without any necessary value judgement, quotations from the Bible are generally from *The Holy Bible Revised Standard Version*, New York: Nelson, 1946 and 1952. For similar reasons of consistency, quotations from the Book of Concord are generally from:

Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, edited by Hans Leitzmann, *et. al.*, Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1952, and

The Book of Concord, translated and edited by Theodore Tappert, *et. al.*, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959.

Part One

THE DOCTRINE OF THE GOSPEL

The two essays which appear in part one of this booklet were read in connection with the first meeting of representatives of the National Lutheran Council and The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, held July 7-9, 1961 in Chicago, Illinois. The discussion in connection with the reading of the essays is confidential. However, the group did vote to release the comments of the essayists themselves. These comments were made by Dr. Franzmann, and Dr. Bergendoff at the first meeting of the group in Chicago.

They are as follows:

Dr. Bergendoff reported;

"We agree that the doctrine of the Gospel is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and that the New Testament gives us the standard of teaching of the church. I have emphasized the central truths of this revelation as being those which unify the church. Prof. Franzmann has stressed the radiation of these truths into the fulness of the glory of the message.

"We agree that obedience from the heart to the standard of teaching is essential, and is part of the doctrine of the Gospel. I have probably been more eager to suggest that this can take place within the fellowship created by the unity of doctrine and is not a prerequisite of such unity, while Prof. Franzmann has been concerned that the imperative to obedience be 'built into the Gospel.'

"We agree that the unity of the church is given in Christ and is a mark of membership in the body of Christ, wherein the individual is to attain to manhood in Christ. Further, we agree that there may be different manifestations of this unity, but not any that obscure the fundamental oneness with Christ. In regard to the requirements for unity, Prof. Franzmann would want to ascertain the seriousness of those who accept the confessions. I would respect the statements of the confessing bodies and within a confessional unity work for a fuller understanding of the Gospel by all within the fellowship."

Dr. Franzmann reported;

I

"Both papers make the 'teaching of the Gospel', or 'the Gospel' simply (sic) the indispensable and inviolable basis of the unity of the church. Both, therefore, submit in principle to the authority of the Scriptures.

"The NLC presentation tends to view the 'doctrine of the Gospel' in antithesis to 'whole theological systems' and to emphasize its basic simplicity. The Missouri presentation views the doctrine of the Gospel in its

organic connection with the whole of divine revelation and therefore tends to stress the innate comprehensiveness and complexity of the doctrine of the Gospel.

II

"The NLC presentation emphasizes the fact that man's response to the Gospel is inevitably imperfect and draws the line between justification and sanctification rather stringently. The Missouri presentation emphasizes the not-to-be-relaxed tension of holy living under which the Gospel puts believing man.

"The NLC presentation looks toward a variety of ecumenical relationships and envisages degrees or stages of fellowship proportionate to the degree of consensus which has been attained. The Missouri presentation is oriented toward doctrinal confessional unity between Lutherans and raises the question of the *damnamus* as indispensable to the proclamation of the Gospel as both a savor of life and a savor of death."

The following persons were present at the meeting in Chicago.

Representatives of the National Lutheran Council:

Dr. Conrad Bergendoff (Augustana)	Dr. Malvin H. Lundeen (Augustana)
Dr. Frank K. Efrid (U.L.C.A.)	Dr. Norman A. Menter (A.L.C.)
Dr. Paul C. Empie (U.L.C.A.)	Dr. Raymond M. Olson (A.L.C.)
Dr. Edward C. Fendt (A.L.C.)	Dr. F. Eppling Reinartz (U.L.C.A.)
Dr. Franklin Clark Fry (U.L.C.A.)	Dr. Alvin N. Rogness (A.L.C.)
Dr. David Granskou (A.L.C.)	Dr. Fredrik A. Schiotz (A.L.C.)
Dr. Donald R. Heiges (U.L.C.A.)	Dr. Henry F. Schuh (A.L.C.)
Dr. Walter Kukkonen (Suomi)	Dr. John M. Stensvaag (L.F.C.)
Dr. William Larsen (A.L.C.)	Dr. Theodore G. Tappert (U.L.C.A.)
Mr. Harold LeVander (Augustana)	Dr. Raymond Wargelin (Suomi)
Mr. Erwin H. List (U.L.C.A.)	

Representatives of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod:

Dr. John W. Behnken	Dr. L. B. Meyer
Dr. H.J.A. Bouman	The Rev. Norman Nagel
Dr. Martin H. Franzmann	Dr. Theodore F. Nickel
Dr. A. O. Fuerbringer	Dr. George W. Wittmer
Dr. Oliver R. Harms	

A LUTHERAN STUDY OF CHURCH UNITY

by DR. CONRAD BERGENDOFF

I

THE DOCTRINE OF THE GOSPEL

1. The varying texts of the Augsburg Confession in German and Latin, might lead one to question whether there is a difference between them in regard to the relationship of the Gospel to the unity of the church. Whereas the Latin "*consentire de doctrina evangelii*" seems to denote an intellectual consent to the formulation of the substance of the Gospel, the German "*nach reinem Verstand das Evangelium gepredigt*," evidently looks to a public proclamation according to a pure understanding of that Gospel.¹ But if we remember that *doctrina* is to be understood not as a definition but as teaching or proclamation, and that this teaching is to be "*nach reinem Verstand*," the two will appear as supplementary, not as contradictory, to each other. The article thus states that for effective preaching it is necessary to have clear concepts of the contents of the message, and that such concepts must give clear tone to the preaching of the church.

2. If we take seriously the Latin text, we are led to try to formulate what the Gospel is. In a broad sense, of course, we can say that Gospel and New Testament are synonymous. But the course of the Reformation forced Luther and his colleagues to make more precise what is the substance of the New Testament. Indeed, one may say that the Reformation was an attempt to clarify the central teaching of the New Testament as over against a number of interpretations which also claimed biblical basis but which missed the main, creative, element in the Word. And the claim of the Reformers was that the New Testament itself clearly witnessed to this central truth, so that its authority derived from no human council or decree but from the written Word. The *doctrina evangelii*, thus, is what the New Testament proclaims as its fundamental truth and this is the Gospel which is to be preached in the church of Christ.

3. In the New Testament, therefore, we are to find what this Gospel is. We are not free to determine it from any other source, nor may we add to or detract from it by considerations for which we may adduce rational arguments or traditional interpretations. In Lutheran discussion we follow Luther's words, "The Word of God is and should remain the sole rule and norm of all doctrine, and no human being's writings dare be put on a par with it, but that everything must be subjected to it."² All the more important it is that we clearly distinguish between that Word and human interpretations of it. Here also Luther has shown the way. "For it is dangerous to play with the

1. Augsburg Confession, VII,2, see Lietzmann *et al.*, *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1952), p. 61.

2. Preface to *Opera Latina*, W.A. 54:179-87.

Word of God by which conscience and faith are to be guided. Therefore, interpretations of God's Word must be lucid and definite having a firm, sure, and true foundation on which one may confidently rely."³ The following study seeks to hold firmly to these directions.

4. The command by which Christ established the mission of the church was in terms of making disciples by baptizing and teaching. They were to teach "all nations . . . to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19f.). To the Twelve, and to Paul, it was clear that the Gospel derived from Christ, and that he was the foundation of the church. "For no other foundation," Paul wrote to the Corinthians, who were arguing about authorities, "can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 3:11). He does say that as a *SOPHOS ARCHITEKTON*, he laid a foundation on which some one else is building, but he hastens to add that Christ Himself is that foundation. His own skill as builder is his recognition of the corner-stone laid not by man, but by God. He contrasts his own unworthiness, "unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God," with the grace of God, which proved not to be in vain. It was that grace which made it possible for him to preach the Gospel to the Corinthians. In this letter to them he reminds them "in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved." As of first importance he described "what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve . . . to more than five hundred brethren at one time . . . to James . . . to all the apostles" (I Cor. 15:1-10). Christ, who died for our sins, was buried, rose again and who appeared to those he commissioned to tell what he had taught and done—this was the foundation whose base went deep into the Old Testament scriptures.

5. He who commanded the disciples to teach and revealed himself to them as more than man. To them he was the revelation of God, and "all authority in heaven and earth" was associated with the proclamation of his Gospel. It was more than a theory, or a philosophy, that they were to mediate to all nations. When they baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, they were being used by that Spirit to perform a work which was more than theirs. "For the love of Christ controls us," Paul could write, again to the Corinthians, "and not any human ambition." "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the ministry of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (II Cor. 5:17 ff.).

6. It is such a passage that justifies the German rendering of *doctrina* in which the Gospel is defined as a preaching.⁴ The Gospel is the Word of God active in the minds and hearts of man. "God is making his appeal" through

3. *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, L.W. 40:190.

4. Augsburg Confession, VII,2, see Lietzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

those who proclaim him. The Gospel is the working of the power of God to bring men into a right relationship with God not only a communication of intellectual propositions. It is God pleading with man. It is God giving his Son "who knew no sin to be sin" so that we who have no righteousness "might become the righteousness of God" (II Cor. 5:21).

7. Powerful and true though the Gospel is, it is possible to deny it, become indifferent to it, or desert it for some other kind of teaching. Paul had to complain of the Corinthians that "if some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached—or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough" (II Cor. 11:4). He had to reproach the Galatians, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to prevent the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:6-8). And to his youthful colleague Timothy he voiced his concern, "Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us." What that "pattern of sound words" was may be gathered from the preceding passage: "Take your share of suffering for the gospel in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago and now has manifested through the appearance of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." The references to the indwelling Spirit and the life and immortality brought to light through the gospel indicate the action and life which accompany it.

8. "For this gospel," Paul claims, "I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, and therefore, I suffer as I do" (II Tim. 1:8-15). To the Corinthians he had explained "in what terms I preached" this Gospel (I Cor. 15:1-10). In the midst of doubt and persecution the ministry of reconciliation must know the Gospel entrusted to it, and be willing to suffer and die in order to testify to its truth and power.

9. What has been said hitherto clearly points to a Gospel or message which proclaimed what God had done for man in Christ Jesus and what God still does in human hearts by the ministry of the Word. This is the foundation on which alone man can build, and there is no other Gospel in which man can find salvation, though angels might proclaim it. It is the message of Christ dying for our sins and rising to reign in the hearts of his people eternally.

10. There are other passages in the New Testament that speak of man's obedience to this Gospel, passages which imply a difference between the perfect grace of God in Christ and the imperfect responses of man to this grace in all his actions. Paul could thank God, in the letter to the Romans, "that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the *standard of teaching* (TYPOS DIDACHES) to which you were committed" even

though in the same chapter he had to implore them not to let "sin reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions," and instead "to yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life" (Romans 6:12-19). The Corinthians are admonished to contribute generously for fellow believers, for "under the test of this service, you will glorify God by your obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ." "God is to be thanked for his inexpressible gift"—they are to "increase the harvest of their righteousness" (II Cor. 9:6-15). The apostle found it necessary to exhort the Philippians, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that—I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). The Gospel of Christ is certain—not so certain are the members of the church who have "to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). Even the apostle himself confesses to these Christians that he is not perfect, but must forget "what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead" (Phil. 3:12-16). And Timothy is reminded that though he has been acquainted from childhood with "the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith of Christ Jesus" those scriptures, inspired by God, are also profitable for "reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." It is a lifelong process for the child of God to become a "man of God, complete, equipped for every good work" (II Tim. 3:14-17).

11. Concerning "the doctrine of the Gospel," then, we may conclude that there is a message or gospel which is immutable, fixed, certain, which describes what God has done and continues to do for man through Jesus Christ. This is the message of the ministry of the Word. There is also an obedience required of those who are born anew in Christ which may be described as unstable, incomplete, but made possible through the grace of the Word. The church has distinguished between these aspects of the Gospel in its distinction between justification and sanctification. Both are included in the Gospel. Man is saved by grace through faith in this work of God, and not by faith in any of his own works. These, however, must follow as fruits of faith.

12. When the Augsburg Confession speaks of the Gospel being preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it, it refers primarily to the teaching of justification, and secondarily to the teachings of sanctification. Thus are the nations to be taught to observe all things Christ has commanded.

II

THE TRUE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

13. The use of the word, *veram*, suggests that there can be a false unity of the church. In the context of its origin the Augsburg Confession distinguishes a true unity from the mechanical, superficial, and enforced unity represented by the Roman hierarchy. The real unity is of the heart with the Lord. It is the unity for which Christ prayed, when he asked the Father to "keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:11), and included in this fellowship those who would come to faith through the disciples, "that they may all be one, even as thou Father,

art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:20). Christian unity is first of all, thus, a oneness with Christ, wondrously like that of the Son with the Father. It is a unity known only to those who believe, and is the result of the atonement which Christ effected when he died to overcome that which separates us from God. Christ could speak of this unity as he approached the end of his earthly ministry, for he had now accomplished the bringing together of man and God which was his mission. By the unity that his people had with himself and the Father the world would know the purpose of his coming.

14. But the unity which the believer has with God cannot be divorced from the unity he has, by that very oneness with Christ, with fellow believers. "By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (I Cor. 12:13). Christ prayed that "they may all be one," and his prayer cannot be thought of as fulfilled by a unity with God apart from unity with fellow-members of the body. To be one in his body is to be in unity also with those who are the members in this body. Yet the New Testament is replete with examples of the incomplete unity which characterizes the fellow-members of the body of Christ. "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (I Cor. 12:27). Yet, they are in need of being taught "the more excellent way" in which they are to live with each other, the way of love (I Cor. 13). As faith unites the believer with God, so love unites fellow-believers within the church. The experience of the early church reveals how far from perfect this unity was. "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." This verse, I Cor. 1:9, is followed by these words: "I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me—that there is quarreling among you, my brethren." Likewise Paul exhorts the Romans to be charitable and sympathetic in their judgments upon each other, though they may not all agree on various customs. "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?", he asks of those who are servants of the same Lord but criticize fellow servants. "God has welcomed" (Romans 14:3) the man who may be regarded as weak in faith by those stronger, therefore "welcome him but not for disputes over opinions."

15. The unity we have in Christ is fundamental, the unity we realize in the fellowship of the church is a result, a faltering and incomplete result, but potential for growth. We are not one in Christ because we have reached full agreement with one another, either in mind or heart. Rather any hope we may have for a greater unity among ourselves, as Christians, results from the unity we have with Christ. "For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility—for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father—you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom the whole structure is joined together" (Eph. 2:13-22). Though "joined together" with Christ in faith we may still be childish, or adolescent.

It is the apostle's prayer that we might learn to be forbearing of "one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." We might then "no longer be children" but "grow up in every way into him who is the head" and "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:1-16). Unity with Christ is given in the moment of justification, when faith receives the Spirit of oneness with him. The unity of the fellowship of Christians is a goal, however difficult, to be reached in a Spirit of love, which is given for this purpose.

16. This Pauline distinction between a unity of faith in Christ and a unity of love in the congregation is evident also in the record of the early church, as given us in the Book of Acts. The disciples were together, after the resurrection, with one accord in prayer (Acts 1:12-14). The congregation to which new members were added by the apostolic preaching, were one in Baptism, in the breaking of bread, in teaching and prayers (Acts 2:41-2); in praise and thanksgiving (Acts 4:24-31); and in intercession (Acts 12:5). Yet among these believers there could be much debate, and difference of opinion, until an agreement could be reached for the guidance of all (Acts 15). And the chief of the apostles could find each other difficult, Peter saying of Paul that "there are some things in them (all his letters) hard to understand" (II Peter 3:15). Paul could counsel "these of us who are mature be thus minded"; he could also exercise forbearance, "if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you" (Phil. 3:15-17).

17. The unity of Christians allows for a variety of manifestations, not only because Christians have progressed in different degrees on the road of sanctification, but because historical circumstances may call forth differing ministrations. There was room in the early church for both an Apollos and a Paul. Different as they were, Paul could yet say, "we are fellow workmen for God" (I Cor. 2:9). Christians are not to be judged by their likeness to each other, but "as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (I Cor. 4:1). Christians who are concerned only by God's judgment of them need to be very careful that they do not judge each other by any other standard than that of faithfulness in one's ministry. And the service by which the church is built includes manifold forms. That service includes the stewardship of material blessings, and the congregations of Macedonia and Achaia set an example in their gifts to the poor in Jerusalem. "To be of service in material blessings" is no less a sacred service than the ministration of "spiritual blessings" (Rom. 15:26-27). One cannot be called "external," and the other "sacred," as if Christ could be divided. Christ is one. Christian faith and love likewise are integral and inseparable.

III

"IT IS ENOUGH TO AGREE—"

18. A study of the New Testament's teaching about unity yields the conclusion that unity consists primarily in unity with God, but this involves a fellowship of those who live in such unity. Both are the fruit of the Spirit working by Word and Sacrament. The unity of the church in our modern sense of organized fellowship is not treated in the Gospels or the Epistles. That those who are members of the apostolic congregations should live in unity is everywhere explicitly demanded. To the Corinthians Paul could write: "Finally, brethren, farewell. Mend your ways, heed my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you" (II Cor. 13:11). Of the Philippians he demands, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that—I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel"—"complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Phil. 1:27, 2:2). And Peter is equally anxious that "all of you have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind" (I Peter 3:8).

19. All of these passages make clear the paramount importance of the unity of Christians in the church. When the abuses and excesses of the medieval church led to schisms, the Reformers restudied the real character of the church. They found many of the ties that had held the church together were of secondary importance, while the primary bond had been ignored or neglected. Hence the declaration of the Augsburg Confession that it was the Gospel that created the true unity, and nothing else could take its place. To it nothing could be added, nor could it be diminished.

20. The force of the *satis est* is as much to declare that not *more* than the Gospel could be demanded for true unity as to declare that nothing less was required. This throws the weight of the matter on what is the Gospel, and we have seen that its sum and substance is the forgiveness of sins secured by the atoning life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Wherever this Gospel is proclaimed and believed there is unity, and such unity should be witnessed to the world.

21. There is warrant neither in Scripture nor in the Confessions for a demand that a whole theological system be held in common before a unity can be established between groups of Christians. Nor can unity be denied except when there is not agreement on the teaching of the Gospel. To claim that there must be perfect observance of all that the church teaches before fellowship can exist is to go beyond Scripture, which demands unity in the preaching of what Christ commanded but itself reveals much incompleteness in the observance of that command. Agreement in the proclamation of the incarnate Christ as given us in the New Testament creates a unity whether it be openly acknowledged or not. But the New Testament calls for a witness to this existing unity, if we are to be true to the Gospel. Altar and pulpit fellowship is the

witness to the unity existing among those who profess the same Gospel; withholding such fellowship when this sufficient unity is present is not an act of loyalty to Christ.

22. The extent to which cooperation in the life and work of Christian communions can go may well depend upon a host of other considerations, historic, political, sociological, psychological. To assert a cooperation on the basis of these conditions while withholding fundamental fellowship in the Word and Sacraments is to turn things around. Those who have the same confessional standard of the Gospel must recognize each other as brethren, and then decide what they can do in common. Even those whose profession of faith may be less comprehensive than the confessions may have a certain unity with Christians of other confessions, because of significant agreements in the preaching of the Gospel. In short we may claim that in the degree to which we can come to a common understanding of the Gospel, in that degree we are able to work together in the ministry of reconciliation. Lutherans who have unity in a confessional understanding of the message of the Gospel are in a fellowship which expresses itself at pulpit and altar and then goes on to an expanding program of service at home and all over the world. With other Christians who profess faith in the Gospel Lutherans may recognize a partial unity by a fellowship of certain types of common evangelism and even forms of prayer and thanksgiving, while working toward a more complete unity expressed in pulpit and altar fellowship.

23. The proposition of complete unity or none at all cannot be defended on scriptural grounds, nor is it the description of the relations between Christians in church history. Rather the Scriptures teach a unity between the believer and the Redeemer which issues in a unity between believers that varies according to circumstances. It is a continuing task of the church to identify the unity that exists and bear witness to it that the world may believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A LUTHERAN STUDY OF CHURCH UNITY

by PROF. MARTIN H. FRANZMANN

- I) "*And to the true unity of the Church, it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments*" Art. VII, Augsburg Confession.

1) *How are we to understand "the doctrine of the Gospel?"*

This is, of course, the key question. If we find the answer to this question, we shall be well on the way to find answers to the others also. What do the confessors mean by the "doctrine of the Gospel"? We note, to begin with, the obvious fact that the doctrine of the Gospel is not "essential doctrine" in antithesis to "expendable doctrines"; it is *the* doctrine, in antithesis to human traditions, rites, or ceremonies. The German version of the article speaks simply of the preaching of the Gospel, and the Apology speaks of agreement concerning the Gospel simply.¹

Article seven closes with a reference to Eph. 4:5-6. The "one Lord, one faith, one *baptism*" of that passage recalls the words of our Lord in Matt. 28:19-20. Since this latter passage emphasizes *teaching*, we may find in it also a clue to the meaning of the *doctrine* of the Gospel. There is an utter simplicity in what our Lord commands: Make disciples, baptize, teach. "Make disciples"—thus he will build the church that triumphs over death, by continuing through his apostles the graciously confiscatory call of "follow me." "Baptize"—this means personal committal to a person: thus Christ lays hold of a man and makes him his own. "Teach"—here the profundity and the complexity of this basically simple "doctrine of the Gospel" comes into view. For the Apostles are bidden to teach men "to observe *all* that I have commanded you," all the riches of the divine self-disclosure which make the Gospel according to Matthew the most powerful book ever written. And indeed there is in this passage, for all its basic simplicity, a large comprehensiveness: One who has *all* authority in heaven and on earth bids his apostles make disciples of *all* nations by baptizing them into the fulness of the trinitarian name and by teaching them to observe *all* that he has commanded them. And he promises to be with them through *all* the days until the close of the age.

Jesus will, through the word and sacrament, create the little ones that believe in him. Thus their faith in him is built upon and is sustained by the knowledge that he is such and such, that he has acted thus and thus for us men and for our salvation and will at the close of the age act once more and decisively for all men for ever. They can believe *in* him, be consigned, committed, and obediently devoted to him, only because they believe *that* he is the

1. Augsburg Confession, VII, 10, "homines sparsos per totum orbem, qui de evangelio consentiunt," see Lietzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

Christ, the Son of the living God, with all that that belief implies. Faith, being both a "believing *in*" and a "believing *that*," is at the same time completely simple and inexhaustibly complex. And the teaching of the Gospel which creates and sustains faith has both these qualities. In Acts 1: 8 the task of the apostles is described by our Lord in its unified simplicity: "You shall be witnesses of *me*." Luke records in Acts 2:42 that the men of the first church devoted themselves, gave themselves continually to the apostles' teaching: this "me" has an inexhaustible content.

This same double aspect of the teaching of the Gospel, simplicity and complexity, appears in the apostolic writings also. Paul can reduce it to the sparse credal formulation: "Confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead" (Rom. 10:9). But when he is seeking to establish a basis for missionary cooperation with the Christians at Rome, Paul massively spells out the Gospel in sixteen closely-packed and tightly-unified chapters. Paul laid the foundation of the church at Corinth, the only possible one, Jesus Christ (I Cor. 3:10-11). How solidly simple that foundation was, we can see from Paul's summary of it in I Cor. 15:3-5. It was basic; but it was also rudimentary: "I fed you with milk, not solid food" (I Cor. 3:2). And men who never outgrew milk take to alien wines and get drunk on them (I Cor. 15:34); they believe in a living Christ and at the same time deny the resurrection of those who are his. Paul must needs give them solid food to sober them: he unfolds the full and complex meaning of "He was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures" (I Cor. 15).

Moreover, since the Gospel is "not man's gospel" (Gal. 1:11), the teaching of the Gospel means a break with, and a renunciation of, all knowing and thinking "according to the flesh" (II Cor. 5:16). Paul the apostle no longer knows the Christ "according to the flesh":

Because his natural way of thinking died out, Paul's relationship to the Christ was transformed. He had formerly thought of the Christ, too . . . in the way that man's natural desiring prescribes. Whosoever thinks according to the flesh considers the Christ impotent because He dies; anathema, because God gives him up into death; past and done for, because he is invisible; a deceiver, because he does not fulfill man's desires.²

Because the flesh lusts against the Spirit, because thinking "according to the flesh" perpetually invades even the renewed mind of the church, the church is constantly tempted by "another" Gospel, "another" Jesus, and "another" Spirit (II Cor. 11:4). And because this "another" Jesus is so plausible an imitation of the true, and so pleasing an imitation because it mutes the scandal and the condemnation of the cross, the teaching of the Gospel must ever and again be explicated to meet and correct these fleshly perversions. Paul's letters to the Corinthians are such an explication: they show how the Gospel, for all its basic simplicity, *must* become as complex as life itself. The Gospel must "take *every* thought captive to obey Christ" (II Cor. 10:5).

Since all christs "according to the flesh" and all gospels "according to the flesh" invade the gracious sovereignty of the one crucified Christ, the Gospel

2. Schlatter, Adolf, *Paulus der Bote Jesu* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1956), p. 562.

gets its hard condemnatory edge (Gal. 1:6-9), and the church which holds fast the word of truth must have the vision and the strength to speak a *damnamus*. This, too is part of the *doctrina evangelii*, as our Confessions show. Article seven of the Augsburg Confession defines the Church as the "congregatio sanctorum, in qua evangelium *pure* docetur."³ The breadth and depth of our confessions make plain that this *pure* is not to be had and kept without a struggle, so that the doctrine of the Gospel becomes a richly articulated utterance.

Because the Gospel is the embattled Gospel and because the church is *sub cruce tecta*, the Church is given the promise: "To him who has will more be given, and he will have in abundance" (Matt. 13:12). And the teacher of the church, the scribe "trained for the kingdom of heaven" is assured by his Lord that he shall be "like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Matt. 13:52). Men learn in repentance and faith that "in Christ are hid *all* the treasure of wisdom and knowledge" (Cor. 2:3).

One cannot say "doctrine of the Gospel" or "Gospel" without saying "Law" also; for the Gospel is a power of God to deliver men from their desperate situation under the wrath of God (Rom. 1:16-18). The Gospel proclaims the Jesus who will deliver us from the wrath to come (I Thess. 1:9), the Christ who died *for our sins* according to the Scriptures (I Cor. 15:3). The foundation laid by Paul at Corinth was Christ *the Crucified* (I Cor. 3:11; 2:2). The anathema of Gal. 1:6-9 strikes men who no longer took the Gospel of the crucified seriously because they no longer took the Law really seriously either, not with the radical seriousness that is characteristic of Jesus and Paul (Gal. 3:10-14; 6:13).

"Gospel" also implies a very specific attitude toward, and a definite understanding of, the Old Testament. The Gospel is the Gospel which God promised before through his prophets in Holy Scriptures (Rom. 1:2). The Christ died for our sins and was raised again on the third day "according to the Scriptures" (I Cor. 15:3-5). Even in a compressed doxological summary such as Rom. 15:25-27 Paul cannot omit a reference to the "prophetic writings" through which the disclosed mystery is "made known to all nations." They have an indispensable place and function in the revelatory act, "according to the command of the eternal God."

To sum up, the "doctrine of the Gospel" is as simple as faith in a person; it has all the riches and the complexity of faith in the one person who is the culmination of all God's revelation, God's "yea" to all his promises, God's "nevertheless" to his wrath, the very Word of God who is decisive for the eternal weal or woe of all mankind.

2) *What teachings are included in said "doctrine," on which agreement is necessary?*

The answer to this question has already been given implicitly. The question would almost seem to suggest a quantitative and therefore intellectual understanding of "doctrine." Thinking along these lines has in it the danger that

3. See Lietzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

we lose sight of the organic interconnection between doctrine and doctrine, the danger that the organic connection between faith in the Triune God and the belief that he is such and such and has acted and will act thus and thus be weakened or broken. We run the risk, in thus thinking, of intellectualizing and devitalizing our dogma, including the dogma that is retained as essential. All valid doctrines are refractions of the one marvelous light: all valid teachings are inflections of the voice of the one Good Shepherd.

For example, should the Second Article of the Augsburg Confession, "On Original Sin," be included among the "teachings . . . on which agreement is necessary?" One could argue that there are many presentations of the essential Gospel, even in Paul, which do not spell it out; that a man could be saved, presumably, without ever having heard of it. But can we who know it label it expendable, and throw away the key to the "clearest gospel" of the Letter to the Romans? For Nygren has surely spoken a true word when he called Romans 5:12-21 "the high point of the epistle, in the light of which the whole is best to be understood."⁴

3) *What interpretations may be left to individual judgment?*

The answer to this question will depend on how one understands the word, "individual." The New Testament warns against an autonomous individualism in the interpretation of the prophetic word (II Pet. 1:20), an individualism that goes beyond what is written (I Cor. 4:6) and twists the apostolic and Old Testament word, to the destruction of the individualist (II Pet. 3:15-16). Paul's insistence on the fact that *all* Scripture is inspired (II Tim. 3:16) is perhaps dictated by another form of individualism, by the fact that men tended to be selective in their use and appropriation of the Old Testament.

The question might, taken baldly, give rise to the thought that there is room and scope within the church for something less than a whole-hearted obedience to the voice of the Good Shepherd. We become free and can be individual, really, only when we have been taken captive by the Word (II Cor. 10:3-6). Then there is room and scope for an individuality and a variety wherewith God is well pleased. The God who has revealed himself in his works, in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament has shown an abhorrence for monotonous uniformity. And his church has, in interpreting his word—in theology, in preaching, in the liturgy, and in hymnody—borne constant witness to the fact that the wisdom of God is a manifold wisdom and that the riches of Christ are unsearchable riches.

4) *Are there injunctions in "the doctrine of the Gospel" which imply growth in sanctification, wherefore a distinction is to be made between "the standard of doctrine" and the varying degrees of obedience to the standard?*

"Man believes with his heart and so is justified" (Rom. 10:10). "Heart" is the whole inner life of man. And so faith is by inner necessity also obedience:

4. Nygren, Anders, *Commentary on Romans* (Trans. Carl Rasmussen, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), pp. 19-26; cf. p. 209.

"You who were once slaves of sin have become *obedient from the heart* to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become *slaves* of righteousness" (Rom. 6:17-18). A man "confesses with his lips and so is saved" (Rom. 10:10). The confession which brings deliverance evinces itself in obedience; Paul speaks of men's "*obedience* in acknowledging (confessing) the Gospel of Christ" (II Cor. 9:13). The sacred writings which have power to make men wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus have their goal in this, "that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (II Tim. 3:14-17). The Gospel is a power and produces a "partnership in the gospel" (Phil. 1:5), a "manner of life worthy of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). Men who hold fast the word of life must needs "shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15-16). Any agreement on the doctrine of the Gospel must deal somehow with the imperatives that are built into the Gospel.

But Paul's words in Phil. 3:12-16 are the definitive answer to any doctrinaire insistence on a certain amount or degree of ethical response as indispensable to agreement on the doctrine of the Gospel. Christian maturity, or perfection, is a continual straining forward, an unfinishedness in laying ever firmer hold upon that which is given men by the Christ who has laid hold of them. When Paul speaks thus, the Christ is speaking in him; for Christ both bade his disciples be perfect and taught them to pray daily for forgiveness. And he made it terrifyingly plain to his disciples that his church exists to serve the weak (Matt. 18).

Paul's words in Phil. 3:12-16 picture the Christian life in antithesis to that of the legalists who have "a righteousness of their own, based on law" (3:9; cf. 3:2-4), men who have "arrived"; and on the other hand in antithesis to the enemies of the cross, who have "arrived" in their way, by coming to terms with sin (3:18-19). Where pietistic smugness or a relaxed secularity has replaced the strained forward tension of men laid hold of by Christ, there is reason to ask whether there is agreement concerning the doctrine of the Gospel in the sense of our confessions.⁵

II) *How shall we define "the true unity of the church?"*

a) *The nature of this unity*

There is a close connection between the "doctrine of the Gospel" and the kind of unity of which Jn. 17:20-23 speaks. It is doubtful whether our Lord is speaking, directly at least, about the kind of unity which concerns us at this meeting. The passage itself defines this unity. As Theodore Jaenicke has put it:

What makes the understanding of this passage difficult for us is the fact that our natural logic cannot think of "unity" without at the same time thinking of multiplicity. We understand unity as the gathering together, the unification, of many; unity of the church, our natural thinking would say, would be the gathering into one of the many and the disparate—a task whose problems

5. Augsburg Confession, VI, and XX, and Smalcald Articles, III, XIII, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, pp. 31, 41, 297, and 315.

again and again frustrate and shame us. But in our passage unity, a being-one, is spoken of in quite another sense.

What sort of being-one does Jesus pray for in V. 21? It is explained by the words: "even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee . . ." there follows a further explanation: "that they may also be in us . . ." So then, the Father in the Son, the Son in the Father, and the believers in both are one—"So that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." There is, then, a chain of sending, from the Father to the Son to the church. The fact that Father and Son are one does not, in the peculiarly Johannine mode of thought, mean the unification of disparate entities: rather, it means that the Son is the bearer of revelation. . . . The Son does not merely point to the Father; He *is* the revelation of the Father. He represents no lower grade of deity; He is no intermediate being, beyond whom one must still seek to find the true God. The whole glory of the Father rests upon the Son. If Jesus then prays for the church "that they may be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee," much more is involved than the unity of the members of the church. . . . What is involved is the authority of the revelation given in the witness of the disciples: As the whole glory of God rests on the Son, so it is to rest upon the church too. "The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me" (V. 22-23). God and Christ are one in such a way that God is to be found in the Christ. The church becomes one in the Father and the Son in the fact that the glory of the Son is to be found in it. "That the world may know . . .". The world does not "Know" by virtue of the unity of the members of the church.

The church's credibility is not thus ensured or guaranteed . . . What is in view here is not the unity or disunity of the church but the oneness of the gift given to the contemporaries of Jesus with the gift given to later generations. In the proclaimed word these later generations have Jesus present among them just as the apostles had. And if they have Jesus, they have God (I Jn. 1:3-4).⁶

But if the passage does not speak directly to the problem of Christian unity, it deals with a reality that is basic to it and points up two basic aspects of this unity; the unity of the church rests on the revelatory action of God, and it is a Christological-personal unity. Both these aspects appear in I Cor. 1:9. "God is faithful, by whom you were *called* into the *fellowship of his Son*, Jesus Christ our Lord." God's call creates the church, and it creates one church; Paul speaks of "*called saints*," and the New Testament knows no other kind. God calls men into fellowship with his Son, and thus they are saints in Christ and one in Christ.

The existence and the unity of the church therefore depend on this:

6. Jänicke, Theodor, *Die Herrlichkeit des Gottessohnes* (Berlin-Bielefeld: Verlag Haus und Schule, 1949), pp. 180-181.

that the church remain under the call of God and in Christ (Eph. 4:1-16). To this end the Spirit is given (vv. 3,4). For this the ascended Christ has given his gifts to men (vv. 7-11). For this the saints are equipped through the gifts of the Christ (v. 12)—namely, that the once-for-all given unity of the church may become the lived and embodied unity of the church, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (v. 14). And here the "doctrine of the Gospel" comes full in view again. The church is no longer to be "tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine" in childish vacillation (v. 14). What Paul sets up as the desirable antithesis to this state of things is usually rendered "speaking the truth in love" (v. 15). But two men who certainly cannot be suspected of a bias in favor of confessionalism have suggested renderings of a more pronouncedly doctrinal-confessional flavor. Martin Dibelius translates: "*Die Wahrheit treiben in Liebe*";⁷ and Rudolf Bultmann renders: "*Des rechten Glaubens in der Liebe leben*".⁸ But if unity is doctrinal unity, it does not thereby cease being personal-Christological unity. By "living of the true faith in love," the church is called upon "to grow up in every way into him who is the head, *into Christ*" (v. 15). And thus the unity of the church remains a living, functioning, organic unity, a unity like that of the human body, in which no part or member is expendable and none is solitary (v. 16; cf. I Cor. 12:12ff).

b) *Are there stages in its attainment?*

The unity of the church both is and becomes. It is both, a divinely given reality and an empirical reality in process of being attained or actualized. Christ *has* created in himself "one new man" (Eph. 2:15); this "one new man" (the church) is bidden to exert himself to "maintain the unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3).

The waiting, embryonic church of Acts 1:12-14 is not yet, in unity as in other respects, the church of the fulfilled promise, the church indwelt by the Spirit which actualized, sustained, and deepened its unity by devotion "to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). This church of Acts 2:42, again, is not yet the church welded together into iron unanimity by persecution, the church that lifted up its voice with one accord to God (Acts 4:24). This church, or the church united in prayer for the imprisoned Peter (Acts 12:5), is not yet that maturer church which faced up to the tensions which threatened to disrupt the unity between Jew and gentile in the church, dealt positively with them and resolved them (Acts 15:5-6; 22-29), so that both Jew and gentile learned to "forbear one another in love" (Eph. 4:2) and moved another step onward toward the fulfillment of the prayer of Paul: "May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:5-6).

7. Dibelius, Martin, *Epheser an Philemon* (3rd. ed., revised by Heinrich Greeven, Tübingen: Mohr, 1953), p. 82.

8. Bultmann, Rudolf, in *Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933-) vol. I, p. 251.

The God of steadfastness and hope has given great promises to the church that presses forward toward the actualization of its given unity. To him that hath shall be given, Jesus had said; and Paul repeated that promise to a church where the attained unity still left much to be desired (Phil. 1:27; 2:1-4; 4:2): "Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you; only let us hold true to what we have attained" (Phil. 3:15-16).

c) *Variety of manifestations*

The writings of Paul bear witness to the remarkable fact that, because of difference in conscience, two men under the same word of God may express their obedience to that word in different and even apparently contradictory ways (Rom. 14-15). Unless the tension which is thus created can be removed without any tyrannizing of conscience, the church is commanded to bear it. The strong in faith dare not despise the weak: and the weak in faith may not condemn the strong for exercising a freedom of which they, the weak, are incapable. The weak may not *demand* of the strong that they conform to the weakness of the weak. But what legalism cannot enforce, the Gospel will do; it will move the strong to a free surrender of privilege for the sake of the brother for whom Christ died. The presupposition under which this tension may be tolerated and may, indeed, prove beneficial is that the revelation under which weak and strong live be not ignored or obscured (Rom. 14:14); in other words, that both the weak and the strong recognize the word of God as the authority under which they are both in their peculiarity permitted by God's grace to live; and that they do not make the peculiarity of their response to that word (either their weakness or their strength) the criterion for membership in the people of God, the standard of orthodoxy.

The apostolic church was large-hearted enough and evangelically flexible enough to embrace both Jew and gentile, first-century Jew and newly-converted gentile. Such a church was flexible enough for almost anything; our problem of racial integration is simple compared with the problem which confronted the men of the first church. But in one point the apostle and the apostolic church were curiously inflexible. Both Jew and Greek, both weak and strong, had the same Gospel, the same Christ. Tensions were resolved, differences were borne, the errant were restored, and missions were carried on the basis of, and in the strength of, a common committal to the one Lord, a common obedience to the one Gospel, with all the simplicity and all the comprehensiveness implied in "Lord" and "Gospel". The apostolic polemics bear witness to the fact that there could be no flexibility here. Paul knew that other men would build on the foundation which he had laid at Corinth; he knew also that the successive courses in the structure would bear the individual impress of the builder (I Cor. 3:10-12). But he made it plain that each man's work would come into judgment (I Cor. 3:13-15); and that for the steward of the mysteries of God there is no surrogate for fidelity (I Cor. 4:1-2). There seems to have been great variety in the organizational manifestations of unity in the New Testament church; but is there any evidence that there was anything like an organizational recognition of fractional obedience to the one Lord?

III) *In the light of "the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments," and of our understanding of the "true unity of the church," can we make a statement regarding the "it is enough," wherein we require neither too much nor too little, but "what is enough for the true unity of the church"?*

Can we make a statement regarding the "it is enough"? This is not an easy question or a simple assignment: and it is our conviction that it would be a mistake to over-simplify it. Certainly we should avoid the pitfall of any merely quantitative simplification of the "it is enough." The riches and the complexity of our Lutheran confessions should be our monitor here. And the New Testament behind our Confessions: Paul supports a simple appeal for unanimity, concord, and humility with one of the profoundest statements of the "doctrine of the Gospel" that the New Testament knows (Phil. 2:1-11).

Nor should we over-simplify in our minds the situation in American Lutheranism. Generalizations like "we are all good Lutherans" or "we all subscribe to the Confessions"—do they really meet the challenge of our situation? Ought we not rather all be asking ourselves whether we are taking our confessions with the eschatological seriousness of the confessors? And have we not all written into the record of history, in one way or another, our peculiar responses to the Confessions—"relaxed," "middle-of-the-road," or "rigorous," as the case may be?

The "it is enough" is determined, in part at least, by the situation here and now. The "it is enough" in the Galatian churches was one thing before the advent of the Judaizers; it was another and a more complex thing after their advent. We cannot unwrite history. The differences within American Lutheranism can hardly be called merely geographical, sociological, or ethnic. This is documented, not only by the fact that The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is outside the National Lutheran Council but also by the state of things within the National Lutheran Council itself.

A conversation on co-operation has, by common consent, become a consideration of Article VII of the Augsburg Confession. We have gone deeper and cut wider than any of us perhaps really intended at the outset. We should thank God for that. And we should go on, take the time and do the work which history, that is the Lord of history is asking of us, aware of the seriousness of whatever decisions we make. The imperative that is over us in our uncertainty and dividedness would seem to be the imperative of II Cor. 13:11: and that is a present imperative, a durative one: "Be a-mending". And it is hardly a usurpation of the prophet's office to say that our chances of attaining Lutheran unity in America depend on how seriously we are ready to take that imperative.

Part Two

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONFESSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION

The two essays which are written in part two of this booklet were prepared and read in connection with the second meeting of the representatives of the National Lutheran Council and The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod held November 18 and 19, 1960 in St. Louis, Missouri.

The discussion in connection with the reading of the essays is confidential. However, the group did vote to release the comments of the essayists themselves. In this case, because there was one statement, the group voted to accept this statement as a press release, and an expression of the consensus of the group.

The statement is as follows;

"Substantial agreement was reached with reference to (1) designation of the confessions which are involved in subscription, (2) assertion of historical limitations in the Confessions, (3) allowance of distinction between the primary norm of the Scriptures and the secondary norm of the Confessions, (4) recognition that the heart of the Confessions is their witness to the Gospel, (5) acknowledgment that this understanding of the Gospel requires rejection of contradicting understandings, (6) affirmation of the importance of confessional subscription for the proclamation of the church.

"Since there was substantial agreement on the significance and nature of confessional subscription further talks between The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the National Lutheran Council are being planned."

The following persons were present at the meeting in St. Louis.

Representatives of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod:

Dr. John W. Behnken
Dr. George Beto
Dr. H. J. A. Bouman
Dr. Martin H. Franzmann
Dr. A. O. Fuerbringer

Dr. Oliver R. Harms
Dr. L. B. Meyer
Dr. Theodore F. Nickel
Dr. George W. Wittmer

Representatives of the National Lutheran Council:

Dr. Conrad Bergendoff (Augustana)	Dr. Malvin H. Lundeen
Dr. Frank K. Efirid (U.L.C.A.)	(Augustana)
Dr. Paul C. Empie (U.L.C.A.)	Dr. Norman A. Menter (A.L.C.)
Dr. Edward C. Fendt (A.L.C.)	Dr. Raymond M. Olson (A.L.C.)
Dr. Franklin Clark Fry (U.L.C.A.)	Dr. F. Eppling Reinartz (U.L.C.A.)
Dr. David Granskou (A.L.C.)	Dr. Alvin N. Rogness (A.L.C.)
Dr. Donald R. Heiges (U.L.C.A.)	Dr. Fredrik A. Schiotz (A.L.C.)
Dr. Alfred Jensen (A.E.L.C.)	Dr. Henry F. Schuh (A.L.C.)
Dr. Walter Kukkonen (Suomi)	Dr. John M. Stensvaag (L.F.C.)
Dr. William Larsen (A.L.C.)	Dr. Theodore G. Tappert
Mr. Harold LeVander (Augustana)	(U.L.C.A.)
	Dr. Raymond Wargelin (Suomi)

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONFESSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION

by PROF. THEODORE G. TAPPERT

1. We need to remind ourselves at the outset that Lutheran churches have not always included the same documents in their collections of confessions. This was not only true in the sixteenth century; it has remained true to our own time. It is common knowledge that in the churches of Norway and Denmark as well as in their North American daughter churches it has been customary to limit subscription to the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism. It is not so commonly known that in some other Lutheran churches subscription has included such additional items as Melancthon's *Loci Communes* (Pomerania), Luther's Great Confession concerning the Holy Supper (Osna-brück), the Saxon Visitation Articles (Saxony), Urbanus Rhegius' booklet, "How One Should Speak Circumspectly about the Chief Articles of Christian Doctrine" (Lüneburg), or the Barmen Declaration (Austria). Some Lutheran churches have required subscription to "the four chief symbols" (Lauenburg)—the *Te Deum* in addition to the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds—while others have officially singled out only the Apostles' Creed. Historical circumstances, involving political and geographical as well as ecclesiastical considerations, account for these differences. Of far more importance is the universal acknowledgment of the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism, and the actual if not explicit use of the Apology, Smalcald Articles, Large Catechism, and Formula of Concord in interpreting the Augsburg Confession and Small Catechism. In so far as this is so, there is much more actual agreement as to confessional standards in world Lutheranism than the diversity of *corpora doctrinae* might at first sight suggest.

2. Another preliminary observation needs to be made, and this is that the Lutheran Confessions included in the Book of Concord have generally occupied a more important place in American than in European church life. In most countries of Europe a close relationship was established between church and state and between Lutheranism and national culture. Whether state churches or folk churches emerged, the consequence was that unity tended to be preserved not only by confession of a common faith but also by participation in a common nationality and culture. Conditions which obtained in America made a continuation of the European pattern impossible in the long run. Denominational diversity and separation of church and state led to voluntarism in church membership. While ethnic and cultural ties continued for a time to hold immigrant groups together, eventually Lutherans were compelled to come to terms with their new environment and find their unity in a common confession, in "agreement in the teaching of the Gospel." It may be maintained that Lutherans in America have thus come closer to realizing the intention of the Reformers than many of their European brethren. Be this

as it may, the Confessions have on the whole been taken more seriously in North America than in Europe, although the recent revival of interest in the Confessions abroad should not be underestimated.

3. It is as norms for the proclamation of the church that the Confessions are taken seriously. Laymen usually employ the shortest and simplest creedal form, the Apostles' Creed, when they make a public confession of their faith. Significantly this is the form that is recited at Baptism and confirmation, and this is the form that receives ampler exposition wherever Luther's Small Catechism is made the basis of catechetical instruction. Relatively few laymen have any real acquaintance with the Augsburg Confession, although it was the fashion in the nineteenth century to make it accessible to the laity by reproducing it in hymnals. Only very exceptional laymen have ever read the other sixteenth century documents in the Book of Concord, and they are neither required nor expected to do so. But ministers of the church are. Because of their responsible positions of leadership, ministers are expected to have a fuller knowledge than laymen of the historical landmarks of the church's developing understanding of God's revelation of himself. They are also expected to embrace as their own the understanding of God's revelation to which these statements bear witness. This is so because ministers are called not to speak for themselves alone but to speak for the church, not to conduct open forums on religious topics but to proclaim good news. If men are to exercise a ministry within a fellowship which has a common understanding of the Gospel and which professes to owe its very existence to this Gospel, they must be willing to subscribe the creeds and confessions which, properly interpreted, express this understanding.

4. Proper interpretation is of crucial importance. All creeds and confessions bear the marks of the ages which produced them. Because they are historical documents they can be understood only in the light of the concrete, unrepeatable situations out of which they came. Content as well as form were in some measure shaped by the circumstances. The Augsburg Confession is different from the Smalcald Articles not only because the first was framed by the cautious, conciliatory Melancthon and the second by the bold, defiant Luther, but also because the situation at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530 was vastly different from the situation created by the pope's call of a council of the church in 1537. Two different reflections of Luther may be seen in his Small and Large Catechisms which came from the press almost simultaneously in 1529: the quiet, reflective, patient pastor instructing householders and children, and the polemical, verbose reformer challenging fellow preachers. A proper interpretation of the Confessions must take such things into account. When the Confessions were assembled in the Book of Concord pains were taken to keep them in their historical context by preserving the prefaces to the several documents which set forth the occasions for their preparation.

5. Proper historical interpretation also requires acknowledgment of the larger setting of the Confessions in the Reformation movement. Those who came to be called Lutherans were involved in a two-front war. They were under the necessity of clarifying and defending their own interpretation of Christianity over against the interpretations of Catholics on the right, and Ana-

baptists and Zwinglians on the left, "against the aberrations of the papacy and of other sects."¹ In effect, therefore, the Confessions were answers to the question, "What is Lutheranism?" It is noteworthy in this connection that all the Reformation documents included in the Book of Concord with the sole exception of the Formula of Concord were written in a period of only eight years, between 1529 and 1537, for this would in itself suggest that all these confessions expressed the same understanding of the Christian faith. Such an assumption is fortified by the fact that these documents came from the pens of the two leaders of the Lutheran movement, Luther and Melancthon, who were intimately associated with each other during this period. It is therefore legitimate to look for harmony in the affirmations which these confessions make. In fact, such harmony can be established by close examination of the Confessions themselves if they are read in the context of the larger situation out of which they came and with the help of other contemporary writings of the same authors rather than in the light of later theologians. As the Formula of Concord put it, the earlier confessions were testimonies which showed "how at various times the Holy Scriptures were understood in the church of God by contemporaries."²

6. It is one thing to establish by literary and historical investigation what the confessors were actually declaring and quite another thing to decide whether they were justified under the circumstances in declaring what they did. To arrive at a judgment here requires a fair historical appraisal of the alternative interpretations of Christianity both on the right and on the left, and then also a careful theological decision as to whether "the Holy Scriptures were understood" aright by those who were "contemporaries." When subscribing the Confessions today, Lutherans assert that, in view of the issues which were then at stake and the alternatives which were then offered, the confessors were right. It is clear therefore that one cannot subscribe the Lutheran Confessions without affirming the Luther Reformation.

7. We need now to look more closely into the relevance of the Confessions to the proclamation of our generation. Almost four hundred years have passed since the last of the Lutheran Confessions was written. The language employed then does not always convey the same connotation to us today. We use terms like "substance," "accident," "merit," and "satisfaction" with greater caution and reserve than the authors of the Formula of Concord. Even when we are impatient we usually refrain from publicly calling our opponents "rude asses," "godless sycophants," or "windbags," as Melancthon did in the Apology. We know today that the etymology of the word "mass" which was confidently proposed in the Apology is wrong. We no longer assert as unqualifiedly as the Augsburg Confession did that baptism is necessary to salvation, and we are rather less sure than the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope that Matt. 16:18, 19 refers to Peter's confession instead of Peter. A relation between church and state is assumed in some of the Confessions which hardly commends itself to us today. These concrete examples

1. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, 5, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 504.

2. Formula of Concord, Epitome, Intro., 8, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 465.

will serve to illustrate the historical limitations of the confessors and the changes which have taken place in our knowledge and understanding of some things since the sixteenth century.

8. Of course, the Lutheran Confessions themselves do not claim to be expositions of the Christian faith whose every expression is perfect and timeless. The Formula of Concord took pains to distinguish between the authority of the Scriptures and the authority of creeds and confessions. The latter "are not judges, like Holy Scriptures, but merely witnesses."³ "The Word of God is and should remain the sole rule and norm of all doctrine, and . . . no human being's writings dare be put on a par with it."⁴ Alongside this clear distinction it was also claimed that the teachings in the Confessions were "grounded clearly on the Holy Scriptures." The Confessions themselves therefore assert both a *quatenus* and a *quia*, both that the Confessions should be acknowledged only in so far as (*quatenus*) they agree with the Scriptures and then also because (*quia*) they agree with the Scriptures. John Conrad Dannhauer (d. 1666) was quite right in declaring that by itself a *quatenus* subscription is not enough because one can subscribe even the Koran "in so far as it agrees with the Scriptures." On the other hand, the later pietists who had scruples about some things in the Confessions were also right when they insisted that a *quia* subscription by itself is not enough. Tension between the witness of the Scriptures and the witness of the Confessions must be allowed, and indeed asserted.

9. This can also be put in another way. God always addresses man mediately and at the same time immediately. He addresses us in oral or other witness to his mighty acts in history, especially in the good news of his deed in Christ which has been handed down to us from the time of the apostles. God comes to us, as it were, on a horizontal plane through a long chain of witnesses who have at least preserved the Scriptures even when they have not had a univocal understanding of them. At the same time God addresses us vertically, directly, now. These are not two different approaches of God, for God continues to speak to us today through the Gospel that was once for all delivered to the saints. The Augsburg Confession acknowledges this when it asserts, "Through the Word and the sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel."⁵ The Confessions are themselves a literary deposit of the living encounter which men in the sixteenth century had with God when they heard his Word. They affirm that God will speak to later generations in similar fashion. They may be said to presuppose that later generations, standing in the same horizontal tradition, will apprehend and express their own encounter with God in relation to the situation in which they then find themselves, but not without reverent regard for and reverent recognition of God's witness to himself in the Reformation. A two-fold obedience is therefore required of us: we must listen to God as he speaks to us in the witness of the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures and we must listen to

3. Formula of Concord, Epitome, Rule and Norm, 8, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 465.

4. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, 9, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 505.

5. Augsburg Confession, V, 2, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

God as he spoke to and through the Reformers—indeed, as he spoke to and through Christians throughout the entire history of the church.

10. The Reformers believed that there was a contradiction in some fundamental matters between the testimony of the Scriptures and the proclamation of the church in their day. They also reckoned with the possibility that similar contradiction might recur and held that "the Word of God *is and should remain* the sole rule and norm." When some Lutherans today raise questions about what the Formula of Concord asserts concerning the third use of the law (Article VI), they are not only alleging that the Formula misunderstood Luther but they are also suggesting that statements in the Formula may be in conflict with the testimony of the Scriptures. Without attempting here to set forth the pros and cons on this matter, it may be useful to inquire what is demanded of the church when a question like this is raised. It is clearly not permissible to declare the question out of bounds simply because an answer has already been proposed in the Formula, for this is contrary to what the Formula itself declares about norms. K.F.A. Kahnis was right when he said, "Whoever thinks that the teachings of the Lutheran Church are true because they are Lutheran is no Lutheran."⁶ It is accordingly a part of the continuing theological task of the church to discover, in so far as this is possible, what the truth is, and not merely to defend or apologize for an utterance in the Confessions. All the resources of the biblical, historical, systematic, and practical disciplines must be brought to bear on the question at issue. All the freedom that is compatible with responsible theological conversation must be allowed. In time a solution will presumably be reached, either establishing or qualifying what was stated in the Formula of Concord. Something like this has already happened with regard to the examples mentioned above (paragraph 7).

11. Unlike some later confessional declarations of other churches, the Lutheran Confessions were products of the Reformation itself. We are living in a time in which there is great appreciation for the Reformation, and the Confessions of the Reformation share in this appreciation. Besides, the juxtaposition within the Book of Concord of a variety of statements with a variety of ways of expressing the same teachings has afforded a flexibility and a richness which contrasts favorably with the rather more rigid definitions encountered elsewhere. This helps to account for the fact that the Confessions have retained a more important place in the Lutheran church than parallel declarations of faith in other churches.

12. It has occasionally been suggested that some statements in the Lutheran Confessions should be removed or altered. Attempts made in the past to revise the Confessions have been so unsatisfactory, not to say disastrous, that this solution does not commend itself. Moreover, the Confessions are in the first instance the testimony of the Reformation, and it behooves us to listen to this testimony just as it was given. Here it deserves to be remembered that it was the unaltered testimony from the past that helped many a man find his way back into the church after the period of rationalism. During the subsequent confessional awakening in the nineteenth century it sometimes became

6. Kahnis, K. F. A., *Die lutherische Dogmatik historisch-genetisch dargestellt* (Leipzig, 1861-68, 3 vols.), vol. I, p. 7.

customary by way of reaction to require "unconditional subscription" to the Confessions, or "subscription without reservation." Often it was not made clear in the form of subscription just what it was that one subscribed so unconditionally. Certainly nobody today can honestly accept as true every jot and title in the Book of Concord—"not depart even a finger's breadth from content or formulation," the Preface to the Book of Concord expressed it. The form of subscription needed revision rather than the Confessions if men were to subscribe without scruples of conscience. What they could, and probably did, subscribe with hearty good will was the teaching of the evangelical Lutheran church to which the Confessions bore witness. What this "confession within the Confessions" is must be clarified anew in every generation after attentive consideration has been given to every jot and tittle in the Book of Concord. Only thus can the continuity of the church be preserved without lapsing into sectarian obscurantism and without ultimately being untrue to the Confessions themselves.

13. Points in the Confessions to which Lutherans themselves may take exception are astonishingly few and are usually formal rather than substantive. The understanding of the Word of God to which the Confessions are historical witnesses still commends itself to Lutherans as in harmony with the Scriptures and therefore as true. That God has not left himself without witness and has revealed himself especially in Jesus Christ, that he is a God of judgment and grace, that in his presence man stands as a sinner in need of forgiveness, that man is justified by God's grace through faith without the works of the law, that it is through the Word of God that the Holy Spirit awakens faith, that a new life of obedience follows upon faith—such affirmations are still embraced by Lutherans today with the same whole-hearted conviction as in the sixteenth century. Besides, certain alternatives are still rejected—for example, that children are "innocent" in God's sight until they commit outward acts of sin, that the baptism of infants is wrong, that man can in some measure make himself worthy of salvation. Acknowledgment of historically conditioned expressions in the Confessions must not be allowed to obscure the impressive identity in what has been and still is believed, taught, and confessed. Confessional subscription asserts such identity.

14. Not only do candidates for ordination subscribe the Confessions to profess their own faith and declare their intention to preach and teach accordingly, but congregations, synods, and churches express similar adherence to the Confessions in their respective constitutions. The purpose is to declare how the Word of God is understood and to obligate all ministers of the church to proclaim the Word of God in accordance with this understanding. It is of the utmost importance that the Word of God be proclaimed in its purity, for it is through the Word that the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth. Consequently the church has not only the right but also the duty to guard against any distortion or foreshortening of its proclamation. There can be no doubt that there are individual ministers in every church body who do not live up to their profession, whether because of ignorance, in advertence, or bad faith. No church discipline has ever been devised which can altogether eliminate incompetence

or insincerity, and if it could be devised it would almost certainly destroy the freedom of inquiry which is essential to theological vitality and ecclesiastical health. There can be no doubt, either, that conventions of synods and of churches occasionally take actions which may be questionable in terms of the avowed confessional position, but such instances should not be interpreted out of hand as demonstrations of faithlessness; they may only prove that questions pertaining to faith cannot be decided by majority vote. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession has something to say to us that should be appropriate in connection with all of this: "In all families and communities harmony should be nurtured by mutual aid, for it is not possible to preserve tranquility unless men cover and forgive certain mistakes in their midst. In the same way Paul commands that there be love in the church to preserve harmony, to bear, if need be, the crude behavior of the brethren, and to cover up minor mistakes, lest the church disintegrate into various schisms and the hatreds, factions, and heresies that arise from such schisms."⁷

7. Apology of the Augsburg Confession, IV, 232, see Tappert, *op cit.*, p. 139.

IN NOMINE JESU, THOUGHTS ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONFESSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION

By PROF. HERBERT J. A. BOUMAN

I

This is a meeting between representatives of the National Lutheran Council, which involves eight Lutheran bodies, and The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Whatever differences there may be, all of us have the name, "Lutheran," in common. This fact is the basis of our conversation. Whether we like it or not, the name, "Lutheran," raises the confessional issue. It is affirming that every church which bears that name is claiming for itself an identity which aligns it with a clearly recognizable branch of western Christendom and, by that same token, is clearly distinguished from other associations which are known by another name and profess identification with another confession. If this were not the case, the claim inherent in the name would be false or meaningless, or both. In either case, a drastic revision of both name and claim would be a necessity.

All of us bear the Lutheran name, and we bear it sincerely and gratefully. What common denominator permits us to do this? Lutherans in this country and elsewhere have sometimes been characterized as liberal, conservative, and middle-of-the-road. Others have spoken of good Lutherans, fair Lutherans, and poor Lutherans. Still others have used terms like gnesio-Lutherans, compromise-Lutherans, and other more or less descriptive hyphenations. It is not my present purpose to evaluate the propriety of any of these qualifications. All of them could be, and often are, over-simplifications subject to woeful distortion. None of them permit automatic, or blanket, application. I mention them merely to ask some questions: On what basis can any one claim to be, or call some one else, a Lutheran of one kind or another? Are there reliable objective criteria, quantitative, qualitative, or both, that make valid judgments possible? Before such questions can be considered, we must ask others: What does "Lutheran" mean? Is there a simple, universally acceptable answer? Can any professing Lutheran provide an answer that is not *a priori* open to the charge of bias and subjectivity? On the other hand, can any non-Lutheran, committed as he is to presuppositions at variance with Lutheranism, render an impartial and fair opinion?

A glance at world Lutheranism today will disclose a vast and complex array of ecclesiastical groupings. Most of them are affiliated in federations and conferences with varying degrees of explicit theological involvement. Many have more or less close or loose ties with national governments. Some are leagued with other confessional groups across denominational boundaries. Some have inter-communion arrangements with non-Lutheran bodies. Some insist for their fellowship relations with others on comprehensive doctrinal accord,

others are less stringent in their requirements. And some are listed in the Lutheran category without explicit commitment to any classic Lutheran norms. To be specific, which of the Lutheran groups, the Lutheran World Federation, the National Lutheran Council, the Synodical Conference, the Scandinavian national churches, the German Lutheran territorial churches, the churches of the Union, or Batak, presents a true, completely undistorted image of what is genuinely Lutheran? To our question there would quite probably be as many answers as there are individual Lutheran churches. The very multiplicity of answers supplied by modern fragmented Lutheranism would tend to confuse, rather than clarify.

Nor can the awesome and highly articulate literary product of 17th century Lutheranism furnish a single, consistent reply. No, not even Luther himself will supply an unequivocal response. Luther has been made the patron of nearly every conceivable and inconceivable opinion all across the theological spectrum by a great company of writers, each charging in and out of the library "Weimar" and exclaiming, "Eureka, I have discovered the 'real' Luther!"

There is only one reliable and definitive answer to the question regarding Lutheranism, and that is the formal articulation of the "faith, doctrine, and confession" of the Lutheran church in its formative and constitutive generation. No discussion of what is Lutheran apart from the Lutheran Confessions or symbols is at all relevant. This means also that the vicissitudes of Lutheranism through four centuries, perhaps involving various modifications of confessional Lutheran doctrine, cannot properly be regarded as normative in determining true Lutheranism in its classic dimensions.

Much of this hardly needed saying, because all major Lutheran alignments to this day are openly oriented to the Holy Scriptures *and* the Lutheran Confessions. The problem of the extent of the confessional documents to which Lutherans commit themselves need not concern us here. Even where formal acceptance is limited to the Augsburg Confession, or the Augsburg Confession plus Luther's Small Catechism, there is a generally expressed recognition of the other symbolical books of the Lutheran Church as valid interpretations of the primary confession. And indeed, all the documents of the Book of Concord claim to be integrated as a consentient whole with the Augsburg Confession and with each other. The Augsburg Confession at the very outset links itself with the Ecumenical Creeds of the ancient church, the Apology is the express elaboration and defense of the Augsburg Confession. The theologians of Smalcald reiterated their allegiance to it, even as they were affixing their signatures to Luther's and Melancthon's articles. The Formula of Concord desires to be nothing more than the definitive restatement of the theology of the Augsburg Confession in a specific context, and Luther's Catechisms were the instruction manuals of the churches of the Augsburg Confession. So, then, we all accept the symbols of the Lutheran Church. This is what makes us Lutherans. Here is our objective standard of Lutheranism. Should it not be a simple matter to apply this yardstick to any and all bodies classified as "Lutheran" and obtain a reasonably accurate measurement of the respective quality of Lutheranism? Should it not be a simple matter to equate confessional subscription with an unqualified endorsement of the total content?

The matter is not so simple, however. The usual alternative before which a prospective signer is placed is *quia* or *quatenus*. But this does not settle the issue. In the light of the fortunes of *quia* and *quatenus*, we must inquire into the scope of these terms. Is *quia* a clear-cut "because," or does it not perhaps have a built-in *quatenus*? As to the latter, how far is "as far as?" May it ever have the force of a *quia*? Is it possible that every subscription involves both *quia* and *quatenus* at the same time, but operating in different areas?

Even if we may assume that most American Lutheran bodies view their confessional subscription in terms of *quia*, and that *quatenus* may be dropped from our discussion as unsatisfactory, a number of problems remain. *Quia* does not automatically settle the issue. Some of the problems arise from the total content of the symbols themselves. They unmistakably betray their sixteenth century origin. Their historical setting defies transfer to any other country and any other time. Even if we leave out of consideration the problems created by the presuppositions and methodology of some modern theological biblical scholarship, which many conservative Lutherans find unacceptable in principle, there are many items in the symbols of a historical, philosophical, exegetical, terminological, political, and scientific nature that are today demonstrably untenable. The cogency of some lines of argumentation is not apparent. Some individual judgments are questionable.

It has been suggested¹ that unless every statement in the symbols can be unreservedly accepted, there can be no *quia* subscription in the theological sense, on the ground that the doctrinal content cannot be separated from the form in which it is presented. Any change in terminology is said to mean a change in doctrine.² This conclusion seems to me fallacious and unwarranted. On this premise no translation could ever accurately reproduce the original. Werner suggests that because of our changed theological and scientific circumstances it is impossible to accept the sixteenth century confessions as our confessions and that, therefore, they can be no more than the classic "documents of our identity,"³ an attitude which offers "the possibility of doctrinal freedom."⁴ But this, too, is unacceptable. It proceeds from the premise that an identity can be preserved while rejecting the very elements which establish that identity.

The history of four hundred years of Lutheranism shows a considerable variety in the reception of the Confessions. Melancthon subscribed with reservations (though not on doctrinal grounds) to Luther's Smalcald Articles. John Calvin accepted the Augsburg Confession in Strasbourg "as its author himself understood it." The crypto-Calvinists found it possible to be numbered among the churches of the Augsburg Confession. The successive periods of orthodoxy, pietism, and rationalism each interpreted the significance of their subscription in their own way. The church-state tie-ups of many Lutheran groups placed the formal-legal aspects of subscription into the forefront. Many individuals and groups never gave official allegiance to the Formula of Con-

1. Werner, Ernest, "The Confessional Problem," *Lutheran Quarterly*, XI, 3, pp. 179-191.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

cord. Churches of the Prussian Union placed the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism alongside the Heidelberg Catechism and accepted them both to the extent of their agreement and allowed freedom where they diverged. It seems clear that an analysis of the fate of confessional subscription will not help us much in determining what our attitude should be, even though an awareness of the history can serve a most salutary disciplinary function.

II

Important and valuable as all these externals may be in a total study of what is involved when one pledges himself to the Lutheran Confessions, they cannot be decisive. They may easily lead us astray. The Confessions are not *primarily* historical documents subject to the attendant limitations. They have no interest in problems of physical science. Though set in a distinctly political context, their concern is not political. Though often wrapped in the scholastic swaddling clothes of their time, their thrust is not scholastic and intellectual. Though the Confessions claim to be a comprehensive summary of the Scriptures, they have no desire to be regarded as a complete dogmatics. The Lutheran confessors ask for complete acceptance of their position, yet they do not regard their product as a book of rules to be applied mechanically or legalistically. The confessional writings desire to meet fully the ecclesiastical and theological requirements of their day, yet they make no claim of offering a compendium of pat answers to any and every question that might be raised today or tomorrow. In much of the confessional corpus there is little evidence of systematic treatment or of scholarly precision, yet it would be wrong to view them as the naive utterances of a "pre-scientific" age, toward which the intellectuals of a more sophisticated era may adopt an attitude of amused condescension and have a field day in exposing crudities of various kinds. It seems clear that we cannot arrive at a valid statement of the significance of confessional subscription, if this is determined on the basis of an approach that asks questions which the symbols are not concerned about answering. We shall do justice to the problem of our acceptance of them only when we take them on their terms, in a way that is consistent with their purpose and function.

What are the symbols of the Lutheran Church? They are, first of all, confessions in the full implications of the German word, *Bekennntnis*. They are confessions of sin whereby the confessors, realistically conscious of their sinfulness, humble themselves before God in deep repentance and acknowledge their own bankruptcy in his presence. Secondly, the symbols are confessions of faith, as the expression of total trust in God's gracious forgiveness in Christ. Thirdly, the symbols are confessions of praise, the free, spontaneous, uninhibited doxology of pardoned sinners to an unimaginably merciful God. We might call these aspects the vertical dimensions of the symbols. Confession of any kind must be seen as a gift of the Holy Spirit, who creates true repentance and faith, as well as the grace to confess Christ, for he it is who "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies."⁵

5. Slink, Edmund, *Theologie der lutherische Bekenntnisschriften* (Munich: Evangelischer Verlag Albert Lempp, 1940), chap. I.

The Lutheran symbols are always consciously *coram Deo*, but they also have far-reaching horizontal dimensions. With their expressed convictions the confessors were ready to face the world and assume the consequences of their position, to bear the cross, to endure ridicule, discrimination, persecution, loss of prestige and property, and even life itself. What they confessed was not the opinion of so many individuals, but the expression of a considered consensus among a great host of Christians raising their voices in harmonious chorus. Through the public profession of their faith they aimed at sharing their evangelical convictions with their contemporaries and with posterity. By their confessional activity they desired nothing less than to be instruments in the building, extension, and preservation of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The reiterated formula, "we believe, teach, and confess," signifies that the strong confessors of Augsburg, Smalcald, Torgau, Maulbronn, and Bergen meant to present a humble, yet open avowal of firmly held convictions for the purpose of imparting the content of that faith to others. Certainly a sober cognizance of these confessional concerns cannot fail to rule out any cavalier treatment, any superficiality, nonchalance, easy-going maneuvers, levity, condescension, and disdain. Face to face with the agonized declarations of men in Christ, whose hearts are laid unashamedly bare before God and man, anything less on our part than a whole-souled agony with the *Wahrheitsfrage* in our quest for the significance of confessional subscription must seem like a profanation, and the shipwreck of any serious approach to the scope of our present involvement with the documents of our priceless heritage on the reefs of any theological fad of the moment must be tragic beyond expression.

This feeling can but be intensified when we view our problem in terms of the specific claims which the Lutheran symbols make for themselves. They are many and varied and we cannot now treat them all in detail. We must confine ourselves to the principal ones. May I suggest the following: The Confessions explicitly claim to be scriptural, evangelical, ecumenical, eschatological, practical, concerned with the ethical question, and of permanent validity. It seems to me that no preoccupation with the Confessions that ignores or by-passes these concerns is competent to do them justice.

Is it belaboring the obvious to dwell on the attitude toward Scripture expressed by the Lutheran creedal statements? Sometimes the obvious tends to be lost sight of, just because it is something to be taken for granted. From the title page of the Book of Concord ("firmly grounded on the Word of God as the only norm") to the last page ("... we reject and condemn as false, erroneous, heretical, contrary to the Word of God . . ."), from the Nicene Creed ("... according to the Scriptures") to Article XII of the Formula of Concord ("... the pure Word of the holy Gospel"), and everywhere in between, the Lutheran symbols accept the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures as the sole, authoritative, unalterable, and final source of all Christian doctrine. Every heteronomous norm is categorically excluded. Their doctrine is "based solidly on the divine Scriptures."⁶ They warn against the activities of the devil whereby he aims to "adulterate the pure doctrine of God's

6. Preface to the Book of Concord, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

Word.”⁷ The adversaries attempt to lead people to embrace “errors that militate against God’s Word.”⁸ The confessors are convinced that the Augsburg Confession is based “on the witness of the unalterable truth of the divine Word.”⁹ The test of acceptance of the Formula of Concord is whether it is “agreeable and conformable first of all to the Word of God.”¹⁰ Their commitment to the unaltered Augsburg Confession is “in accordance with the pure, infallible, and unalterable Word of God.”¹¹ Their “disposition and intention has always been directed toward the goal that no other doctrine be treated and taught in our lands, territories, schools, and churches than that alone which is based on the Holy Scriptures of God.”¹² “*Scriptura non docet*”¹³ is the Lutheran answer to theological speculation claiming doctrinal authority, and the offer is made to all inquirers regarding the Lutheran position to furnish the answers “*juxta scripturas*.”¹⁴ The opponents are accused of having “condemned several articles in opposition to the clear Scriptures of the Holy Spirit,”¹⁵ etc, *ad inf.* This is the *sola scriptura* claim of the symbols. The approximately nine hundred Bible quotations testify to the seriousness of the confessors. Is this claim valid? Do the symbols live up to it? Is it still valid and relevant today? Is the answer self-evident?

It must be admitted that there are some problems in connection with this confessional claim. Sometimes only a small fraction of the Scripture proof for a certain doctrine is actually used (cf. Holy Baptism). The few texts used repeatedly are made to carry the whole doctrinal load. The exegesis of some texts may be questioned on the basis of their context. Occasionally the citation is from an incorrect Vulgate rendering. At times a text seems to be thrown together almost indiscriminately with a long *catena* of other texts and its specific contribution is not readily discernible. It cannot be denied that modern exegetical scholarship has dumped a barrel of questions on the doctrine concerning the Scriptures. Barth, Bultmann, Dibelius, Baillie, and a host of others have led many to the conclusion that the attitude of the symbols toward Scripture is out of date and has been demolished beyond repair.

What shall we say to these things? Certainly the faith of the Lutheran confessors was not grounded on a theological “school,” or on philosophical and scholastic argumentation. They were ready to believe the Scriptures because they fervently trusted in Christ, the Lord of the Scriptures. Surely we today do not rest our faith on crisis-theology or *Formgeschichte*, on demythologization or historico-critical method. We believe in Jesus Christ because the Holy Spirit has brought him to us in and through the Scriptures, and we accept the Scriptures because we render the obedience of faith to our Lord. For

7. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

13. Augsburg Confession, XXI, 2, see Lietzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 83f.

14. Augsburg Confession, Conclusion, 7, see Lietzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

15. Preface to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, 9, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

all "assured results" of honest biblical scholarship that operates in holy awe *under* the Holy Scriptures and does not preside in magisterial presumption *over* the Word we are ever grateful, but we cannot allow ourselves to be swayed or swamped by transitory speculations. In assessing the scope of our confessional allegiance we must come to grips in a profoundly spiritual way with the scriptural claim of the symbols and we dare not permit a secular approach to inveigle us into a *metabasis*. It is for us to determine whether the confessional exegesis faithfully reproduces what God is saying to us, and let our subscription be decided on this basis. It would seem to be impossible to accept the symbols simultaneously with a rejection of the source of all their content.

The compelling force of a system of scriptural evidence stands or falls with the hermeneutical principle. It is truly scientific to deal with a discipline by way of rules that are consistent with the presuppositions of the discipline itself. This makes a thorough-going empathy indispensable. What precisely is God's purpose in His revelation through the Scriptures? This must determine my proper response. That response cannot talk past God's address. We remember what troubles Luther experienced with the scriptural concept of the righteousness of God because of a false hermeneutic which led to a false exegesis, and also what transforming results a correct hermeneutic produced. It is the claim of the Lutheran symbol to have discerned and applied this correct approach to the Scriptures and to have caught the true thrust of God's revelation. The Confessions are oriented to Christ, or, to say the same thing, to justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith, or to the doctrine of the Gospel. When they speak of the Scriptures they place the stress on "the pure, unalloyed, and unadulterated light of his holy Gospel and of the Word that alone brings salvation."¹⁶ "Pure evangelical doctrine" is their unflinching concern.¹⁷ Melancthon is at pains to testify "that we hold to the Gospel of Christ correctly and faithfully."¹⁸ The key to the Scriptures is the recognition that all Scripture is divided into Law and Gospel, that these must be carefully distinguished, and that the Gospel must have the primacy as *the* message of Scripture in its ultimate and decisive sense.¹⁹ This is the "especially brilliant light which serves the purpose that the Word of God may be rightly divided and the writings of the holy prophets and apostles may be explained and understood correctly."²⁰ This, it seems to me, is the central purpose and function of the symbols: to direct men away from themselves to the Scriptures in such a way that they will find there what they are meant to find, a gracious God in Christ, and be led by his Spirit to live by him and for him and to die in him, and so to live with him eternally. It may be coincidence, but I should like to think that the first explicit Scripture reference in the Lutheran symbols themselves, namely, Rom. 3 and 4, is significant as setting the tone for all other quotations.

16. Preface to the Book of Concord, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

18. Preface to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, 15, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

19. See Apology of the Augsburg Confession, IV, *passim*.

20. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, V, 1, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, 558.

Certainly the Lutherans viewed all doctrine from this perspective. Christ is the center of all theology. His Gospel determines the doctrine of man and of sin, for "Christ was given to us to bear both sin and penalty and to destroy the rule of the devil, sin, and death; so we cannot know his blessings unless we recognize our evil."²¹ The office of the ministry has meaning only in relation to the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.²² Good works have their proper place as the fruits of saving faith.²³ The church is rightly seen only as believers assembled around the preached Gospel and the administered sacraments.²⁴ No treatment of Baptism and the Lord's Supper is pertinent that does not proceed from their gift of "forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation," for "toward forgiveness is directed everything that is to be preached concerning the sacraments and, in short, the entire Gospel and all the duties of Christianity."²⁵

In perfect conformity with this passionate devotion to the purity of the Gospel and its centrality in all theology, the Lutheran confessors, following in the train of their Lord and of his apostles, do not shrink from saying *damnamus* to any and every heretical inroad upon the holy Gospel and the glory of Christ. ". . . condemnations cannot by any means be avoided."²⁶ Their incisive polemics, too, are a vital part of the confessional evangelical fervor. Every unqualified "yea" to God necessarily entails as its obverse an unqualified "nay" to everything that belies or obscures that commitment. The love that will not spare itself to embrace fellow-man and fellow-Christian can but be unsparing in its refusal to coddle any subversion of the total Gospel. Our evaluation of the correctness of this orientation must help decide our attitude toward the Confessions.

One of the striking characteristics of the Lutheran symbols is their recurring emphasis on true ecumenicity. What we believe and teach, so runs their claim, is what the apostles taught, what Christians of all ages have believed and confessed in the Ecumenical Creeds. We emphatically repudiate all that is sectarian and schismatic and we reject any charge of doctrinal innovation. It is the Lutherans' desire to "have all of us embrace and adhere to a single, true religion and live together in unity and in one fellowship and church."²⁷ Their teaching "is not contrary or opposed to that of the universal Christian church,"²⁸ or "what is common to the Christian church."²⁹ While the teaching of the opponents represents "an unprecedented novelty in church doctrine,"³⁰ the Lutherans claim for their own confession that "no novelty has been introduced which did not exist in the church from ancient times."³¹ The conscious link with the Ecumenical Creeds and the profusion of patristic

21. Apology of the Augsburg Confession, II, 50, see Tappert *op. cit.*, p. 106.

22. Augsburg Confession, V.

23. Augsburg Confession, VI.

24. Augsburg Confession, VII.

25. Large Catechism, II, 54, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 417.

26. Preface to the Book of Concord, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

27. Augsburg Confession, Preface, 4, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

28. Augsburg Confession, Conclusion of Part I, 1, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

29. Augsburg Confession, Introduction to Part II, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

30. Augsburg Confession, XXIV, 25, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

31. Augsburg Confession, XXIV, 40, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, pp. 60f.

citations to corroborate their position demonstrate that the Lutherans took this claim seriously. Is it still valid? If not, where are the symbols unapostolic, unecumenical, schismatic or sectarian? If the Lutheran position is truly ecumenical, most not our subscription signify a whole-hearted acceptance? And shall we not be dynamically ecumenical today precisely by continuing to insist on our demonstrably ecumenical theological position and by accepting the implications that it involves?

The Lutheran symbols manifest a strong and sober eschatological outlook, coupled with a firm conviction of the permanent validity of their theology. Convinced as they are of the eternally unalterable truth of the Word of God, they are sure that their proclamation of this truth is correct and therefore permanently binding, because the truth of God is not relative. In the promulgation of the Book of Concord they are motivated by their desire "that a pure declaration of the truth might be transmitted to our posterity as well."³² They are taking their stand "before the face of almighty God and the whole of Christendom."³³ Therefore, "by the help of God's grace [they] intend to persist in this confession until our blessed end and to appear before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ with joyful and fearless hearts and consciences."³⁴ In a statement of unparalleled pathos the framers of the Formula of Concord conclude their entire presentation: "Therefore, in the presence of God and of all Christendom among both our contemporaries and our posterity, we wish to have testified that the present explanation of all the foregoing controverted articles here explained, and none other, is our teaching, belief, and confession in which by God's grace we shall appear with intrepid hearts before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and for which we shall give an account. Nor shall we speak or write anything, privately or publicly, contrary to this confession, but we intend through God's grace to abide by it. In view of this we have advisedly, in the fear and invocation of God, subscribed our signatures with our own hands."³⁵ From beginning to end the Lutheran symbols stand in *conspectu aeternitatis*. Such a stance provides an urgency, a motivation, and a sense of values seldom encountered since New Testament times. Here is a true *contemptus mundi* that manifests itself, not in a false aceticism which disparages the gifts of the Creator, but in a genuinely critical attitude toward what really matters in church and world. Why get excited about peripheral and trivial matters when the light of the *Parousia* illuminates the scene? Do we accept this confessional view? If we do, our subscription will signify that acceptance and, by that very act of acceptance, free us from the fretting fetters of things and release our God-given energies for God and his people and His work.

It will not be necessary to speak in detail of other confessional claims which were mentioned. Surely, enough has been said to indicate what was intended by the thesis that confessional subscription involves taking the Confessions on their terms.

32. Preface to the Book of Concord, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

33. Preface to the Book of Concord, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

34. Preface to the Book of Concord, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

35. Solid Declaration, XII, 40, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 636.

III

"This is our confession and that of our associates, and it is specifically stated, article by article . . ." ³⁶ To do full justice to what our subscription to the Lutheran symbols ought to signify, all of us should diligently work through them "article by article" in the same spirit in which the noble witnesses first composed and confessed them. In connection with each article and each doctrine we must inquire after its scripturalness and its relation to the Gospel. In this context the problems raised by history, terminology, logic, etc. will be seen in their proper proportion and will not be allowed to obscure the glories of the eternal realities.

In tracing our steps through the Scriptures and the Confessions we must have the tenacity to come to grips with specifics all along the line. It is one thing to say, "I can't go along with the Confessions," and quite another to say, specifically, where and in what doctrine I must register dissent. Is the confessional doctrine of man's total corruption by sin and man's complete inability to help along in his salvation and conversion true to the Scriptures? Is the doctrine of the person and work of Jesus Christ faithful to the revelation in the Word? Is it correct to uphold the absolute monergism of divine grace, or do man's works in any degree whatever contribute something? It is certainly not possible to accept both. What about the doctrine of the means of grace? Is it true that they are for us the only vehicles of the Holy Spirit's operation, and that they are his efficacious instruments? Is baptism the effective means of regeneration, or is it a symbol thereof? Does the "real presence" mean that Christ's true body is given and received with the bread, and his true blood given and received with the cup, or does this mean nothing more than that Christ is somehow personally present? We must all deal with these questions, before we can intelligently accept or reject. Clearly, I cannot subscribe to the symbols if I am a synergist or believe that man has a free will in spiritual matters, or that man can assist in his conversion. I cannot subscribe to the Confessions and at the same time accept a reformed doctrine of the Holy Communion. I cannot consistently give my heart and hand to a Christ-exalting theology and at the same time condone a Christless natural religion. I cannot subscribe to the doctrine without a constant struggle to conform my life to it.

In conclusion, subscription to the Lutheran symbols is, above all, a matter of attitudes, of repentance and faith, of humility and doxology, of loyalty and courage. Where such attitudes prevail, a sincere willingness to "believe, teach, and confess" in word and deed will manifest the significance of our subscription. In this way we shall be preserved, by the grace of God, from both legalism and laxity.

36. Augsburg Confession, Preface, 24, see Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

APPENDIX

At the November, 1960, meeting of the representatives of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the National Lutheran Council a meeting was planned for the fall of 1961. This will be held in Chicago on October 30th-November 1st. In preparation for this meeting there will be another set of essays written. They will be written by Dr. Martin Franzmann, Professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and by Dr. Alvin Rogness, President of Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul. The subject for the essays is:

"What kind of cooperation is possible in view of the discussions to date?

- a. the relation of cooperation to confessional agreement.
- b. the relation of witness to cooperation.
- c. the extent of cooperation possible apart from pulpit and altar fellowship."